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The 1942-43 catch of pilchards, which in tonnage taken holds first rank among all fishes from American waters, was 20 per cent lower than in the previous season due to wartime conditions, Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Deputy Coordinator of Fisheries, said today.

Canned pilchards are usually sold as California sardines. Contrary to the general impression, there is no specific fish known as a sardine. The term is used for small fish packed in the familiar manner and may cover pilchards, herring, anchovies, or other varieties.

The estimated catch for the pilchard season, beginning last August 1 and ending February 28, is 1,002,576,000 (billion) pounds as against 1,242,008,000 (billion) landed last year. This year's catch is nearly half a billion pounds lower than the record catch of the 1936-37 season.

Due to the reduction in the catch, manpower problems, and other factors, the pilchard industry fell short by 1,400,000 (million) cases of canned sardines which would have been necessary to supply government and civilian requirements this year. Last season the industry was able to pack 5,156,814 (million) cases; the pack in the season just ended is estimated at 3,699,000 (million) cases.

A large portion of the pilchard catch is set aside for the production of oil and fish meal. The oil, in large part, now replaces the cod liver oil formerly imported from Norway and has many other important commercial uses. The meal provides an essential protein factor in animal feeds. The estimated production of oil from pilchards for the season is 13,000,000 (million) gallons, some 4,000,000 (million) less than last year. Fish meal production fell from 90,508 tons to 75,000 tons, Dr. Gabrielson said.

"The pilchard fishery has suffered from the fact that a substantial number of its craft have been taken over by the armed services and, particularly, because of a lack of trained manpower for both fishing and cannery work. The situation as regards vessels may show some improvement before the next season opens, but the manpower outlook for this segment of the fishing industry is grave," Dr. Gabrielson declared.

"Because of the importance of this high-protein-content food during wartime, everything possible will be done to alleviate conditions which have resulted in lowered production," he said, "but I feel that we will be lucky if we can prevent another drop next season."